

Fight And Learn Or Learn And Fight The Second Intifada Lessons

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# **Fight and learn or learn and fight**

## **The second Intifada lessons**

### ***Contemporary Issue Paper***

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Nowadays, fourth generation warfare cannot be ignored; most conflicts are urban and asymmetrical. They have been described by Mao Zedong as subversive wars. The F.L.N. (the National Liberation Front) has used these new kinds of actions in Algeria for the first time. To face a well organized and equipped army, a weaker opponent, like a paramilitary group, can achieve success implementing terrorism and unconventional operations. The second Intifada, known as the Intifada Al Aqsa, beginning in 2000 is a perfect example of the lessons learned by Tsahal, the Israeli army. Although the Intifada occurs in a highly complex and specific political context, it is still an extraordinarily valuable source of tactics that can be used by other armies. The second Intifida comes with the scope of the global war against Islamic terrorism since September 11, 2001. Obviously terrorism has been favored by the Palestinian paramilitary organizations. The U.S. military services, the army and the Marine Corps in particular, must study the Israeli Defence Forces' (I.D.F.) constraints in anti-guerrilla warfare and the I.D.F.'s principles of action because of the conflict's parallelism to the subversive situation in Iraq.

## Similarities

Both the coalition forces and the I.D.F. cope with a similar environment in their respective subversive war. First of all, because the small guerrilla groups cannot confront modern units directly, they prefer to use violent terrorism more often. Of course, these groups do not respect international rights. They choose "soft" targets<sup>1</sup> that are easier to reach, such as the civilian population. However, they utilize all means available and sometimes launch more conventional attacks using ambushes, raids, snipers, and infiltrations. Booby traps are frequently found; mines and road side bombs are easily set up. To stay away from their targets, these terrorist groups use indirect fires such as mortars or rocket launchers. They might also participate in weapons and ammunitions trafficking. At last, they can plan disinformation or computer attacks, not to mention riots and spontaneous civilian demonstrations.

Each country does not have a unique guerrilla party, instead there are several paramilitary troops linked to each other with a politicized or religious organization as its spokesman. The paramilitary group's ideologies are controlled by this organization. The groups are difficult to identify and intercept because of their multitude and their scattered leadership. Guerrilla groups have a passive

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<sup>1</sup> Doctrine numéro spécial, « Intifada Al Aqsa ou Deuxième Intifada », May 2004.

complicity within the local population and thus stay hidden. Money, training, and weapons are provided by powerful foreign support groups<sup>2</sup>. Moreover most groups have covert sanctuaries such as Lebanon, Syria, or Yemen.

The composition of these groups is similar as well. They recruit young, unemployed, and desperate people, both male and female. Fanatics, who want to join the holy war and are ready to commit suicide attacks, come from many other Islamic countries. The terrorists' goal is to disrupt the legitimate and current political system by instilling chaos and fear; but their planning capability is quite limited. According to the Israeli intelligence office, each terrorist group is only several hundred combatants strong, subdivided into smaller groups<sup>3</sup>. Without any permanent base, they keep running, staying within the cities and wearing civilian clothes. Subversive wars encompass a broad scale of actions. Asymmetrical conflicts are characterized by a furtive enemy who is supported by powerful foreign organizations or even countries, but with limited capabilities compared to a modern army. All these characteristics are verified both in Iraq and in Palestine. Therefore Israeli and American forces should have some lessons and issues to share.

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<sup>2</sup> Sir John Keegan, *A history of warfare* (London: Hutchinson, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> Website of the Israeli Ministry of Defence. 11 January 2005. <<http://www.idf.il>>

## Constraints

A conventional army is not prepared for and equipped to survive an asymmetrical war. Task organization, training, protection, and environment are the main constraints the I.D.F. has to deal with. Because a classical threat still exists on its border, Israel needs to keep a conventional defense. Although to face the Palestinian guerrilla and the terrorist attacks, Tsahal has adapted its internal structure. Keeping its tanks and its aircrafts, Tsahal is considering expanding the Special Forces and above all the infantry. Indeed terrain control, surveillance, and urban interventions require more and more dismounted troops. Moreover some infantry units have been specialized and organized as motorized antiterrorist battalions, and all the supporting units are able to accomplish safety and force protection missions. On the other hand, Tsahal has reduced its ground artillery and has disbanded four artillery battalions<sup>4</sup>. But each combined arms brigade keeps its organic heavy mortars.

Secondly the training favors combined arms, especially for urban operations. Urban operations combine task force raids (composed of tanks, combat engineers, and infantry), Special Forces actions, and attack helicopter support<sup>5</sup>. Training is the key point of antiterrorist and urban

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<sup>4</sup> Website of the Israeli Ministry of Defence. 11 January 2005. <<http://www.idf.il>>

<sup>5</sup> Opall-Rome Barbara, "Israel: Training Moves to Front." Defense News, 22 September 2004.

operations, but I.D.F. and American forces are so largely committed and the budgets so tight, that it would soon become the weak point.

Force protection and strength preservation are important constraints too. Rich countries do not accept large human losses anymore. The media and the real time information have changed the conception of modern conflicts and the value of life. The "no dead" concept is now a necessity. There is a huge contrast between the suicide bombers ready to die for their cause and the occidental soldiers. The armored vehicles, especially tanks, give good protection to the crew members. I.D.F. uses them extensively. In urban reconnaissance, they employ dog teams and ground robots.

Finally the Israeli government has recently understood that one does not want to alienate the local population, since it takes care of the civilians. After several blunders occurred right after the beginning of the Intifada Al Aqsa, Tsahal distributed a "behavior rules"<sup>6</sup> book to each combatant. Each ground leader receives a legal orientation to learn how to cope with the civilians. The I.D.F. has also developed its crowd control skill and provided its units with suitable equipment such as shields, smoke grenades, and rubber bullets. Each American company should also have sufficient non-lethal weapons options to

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<sup>6</sup>LtCol Guiora. Jerusalem Center for Contemporary Affairs: présentation du nouveau code de conduite des I.D.F., 23 October 2003.

avoid killing unarmed demonstrators. Combating terrorism on its own soil for a long time, Tsahal has been able to adapt its organization, to train, and to protect its soldiers as well as the population. As a result, Tsahal should then be considered as an example for other armies.

### **Principles of action**

Tsahal has also changed and improved its principles of action with regard to anti-guerrilla warfare. Intelligence, space occupation, border control, and brutal reprisals are the major parts of an overall military policy. These new techniques are probably the most interesting lessons to take-away from the second Intifada. Israel has an historical reputation in human intelligence (HUMINT). Its expertise prevents many bombing attacks. According to the Israeli Minister of Defense, attacks have decreased about sixty percent between 2002 and 2003. This success comes from the number of intelligence agents and informers among the population (ten to twenty thousands)<sup>7</sup>. Of course the ground forces, the reconnaissance units, and particularly the Special Forces, participate in this effort. In fact the synergism between all the sources assures such efficiency. All the nets are linked, combined and integrated. Each piece of information is gathered at

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<sup>7</sup> David Alon Ben, "I.D.F. to streamline service benefits." Jane's Defense Weekly, 10 September 2003.



the government level and is automatically redistributed by the intelligence office to everyone. Cooperation and real time information ensure common data and quick interceptions. Intelligence and information management are the keystone in the terrorism battle. Therefore, the U.S. services should improve theirs taking into account the Israeli experience.

Using a permanent presence, the ground forces also prevent attacks by deterrence. This military omnipresence has an undeniable psychological effect on the Palestinian population and pressures the guerrilla members. But this presence requires strength of will. Eight Israeli brigades are deployed in Gaza and the West Bank<sup>8</sup>. Attack helicopters fly over cities night and day. To fill in its lack of soldiers, Tsahal also has a reserve.

Thirdly, a guerrilla needs sanctuary areas, usually outside the country, in order to supply, plan, and train. The Middle East is the perfect place to provide such zones. To isolate paramilitary groups, the I.D.F. has built a defensive surveillance fence. To prevent infiltration, these fence walls combine pyramid shaped stacks of barbed wire, observation systems, detection fences, patrols, ditches, and rapid reaction forces<sup>9</sup>.

And last, after each attack, the I.D.F. conduct reprisals on terrorists and their accomplices. Generally

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<sup>8</sup> Barbara Opall-Rome, "Israel: Training Moves to Front." Defense News, 22 September 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Doctrine numéro spécial, « Intifada Al Aqsa ou Deuxième Intifada », May 2004.

they seal off a targeted area, which can be either a town or a refugee camp, and then send reinforced battle tank teams. Tsahal does not hesitate to utilize attack helicopters as well as heavy bulldozers. But in all the cases, such operations are well prepared. They have accurate intelligence reports and occur during the night to avoid collateral damages. However, violent reprisals sometimes destroy civilian properties and prove to be a disappointing performance causing a deplorable international opinion. Being so much involved, the Israeli forces have found imaginative solutions that should be taken into consideration by the coalition forces in Iraq.

### **Conclusion**

The I.D.F. represents the most experienced entity with regard to urban combat and subversive warfare. Facing a similar terrorist enemy as those in Iraq, the Israeli forces have recently improved their organization, their training, their combination of arms, their intelligence culture, and their principles of action in order to adapt themselves and react properly to this asymmetrical threat. The American forces tangled up in Iraq should take advantage of this experience and learn how to apply some of these Israeli strategies. Analysing each foreign or national return of experience is one of the best ways to implement tactical procedures efficiently. Actually, even

if the situation in Israel as in Iraq is still not solved,  
current feedback and updated assessments should allow the  
coalition armies and their allies to adapt their troops as  
well as their tactics to a global subversive war.

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